

White House Conference on Aging: Solutions Forum
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The Booming Dynamics of Aging
From Awareness to Action

Panel 4: Solutions around Health and Long Term Care

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The changes that the baby boomers will bring in the next 20 years in increased numbers, diversity and expectations will challenge the current service system and force a redefinition of who we serve and how we deliver services. It is critical that we create communities that are responsive to the needs and choices of a new generation of seniors. This will require that national, state and local policies work together to efficiently use limited resources and maximize the independence and dignity of older adults in our society.

1. Policies need to be directed toward encouraging active aging, promoting maximum independence and offering choices for a diverse baby boomer generation.

This begins with recognizing that multipurpose senior centers have a value in a community and that they are for many a focal point in the lives of seniors and a entrance into the system of support services for older adults. Senior Centers create opportunities and a social environment that promote successful aging among its participants. In a study identifying impact of senior center participation on successful aging, Ronald Aday, Director of Aging Services at Middle Tennessee State University, found that senior center programming improved mental and physical health of a majority of the senior center users and over 75% of the study participants indicated that the center has helped them to remain independent. Center programming was successful in improving the overall health functioning of participants and positive behavioral changes enhanced their ability to exercise self-reliance and achieve a higher quality of life.

Many senior centers receive dollars from the Older American's Act. The trend for these dollars to be redirected to serve only the most frail seniors will not promote cost effective and highly effective programs such as congregate dining centers which have been very successful in reducing isolation, preventing illness and maintaining independent living.

However senior centers, as they have been since the inception of the Older American's Act, will need to redefine the image of seniors, change misconceptions and stereotypes and maintain an avenue for older adults to actively age both mentally and physically.

Policies need to encourage innovative approaches to redesign multipurpose senior centers that support a diverse population of well elders and promote the valuable assets of elders in our community, elders in our work place and elders as volunteers.

2. Adequate support and priority must be given to developing home and community based services that allow younger disabled and frail elderly to remain in their own homes and avoid placement at a higher level of care than necessary. As the number of older people increase and the lifespan lengthens there will be large increases of some very vulnerable groups, many living alone, on low incomes and requiring services such as health care, nutrition, housing, transportation, recreation and education. One such group is those with Alzheimer's or a related dementia. Being a disease of old age, it is predicted that nearly half of all people who reach 85 years old will have some degree of Alzheimer's or dementia. We need to have policies and adequate funding that continue to encourage the development of community based Adult Day Health Care facilities with the ability to provide quality care for dementia clients as well as caregivers and families. Licensing moratoriums need to be eliminated. Flexibility to use dollars to support families, caregivers and/or day care programs, will provide more effective and less expensive alternatives to institutional models.

Seniors will not be able to age in place without policy that directs funds and creative efforts encouraging younger people to pursue care giving as an important and worthwhile profession. This will take efforts in developing appropriate access to training and adequate compensation to attract qualified workers to this field.

Currently our North Coast Senior Service Collaborative is developing a TV video series for training caregivers in an effort to reach out to smaller rural areas of the county.

3. Policies need to encourage innovative community partnerships, collaborations and avoid duplication. The limited federal dollars must be used to leverage local dollars to extend services to a larger demand. Recent collaborations in our community led to a “No Senior Goes Hungry” campaign with a goal to raise public awareness of the needs of frail homebound seniors and a call to action to support additional funding to meet these needs. We have also developed successful partnerships between Title III and Title VI programs that effectively utilize facilities, professional expertise and limited resources.

4. And last, with the growing population to serve and fewer available resources, **aging policies need to focus on streamlining program regulations and eliminating cumbersome and multiple layered oversight.** This only leads to increased administrative costs resulting in less dollars for direct services to older adults.